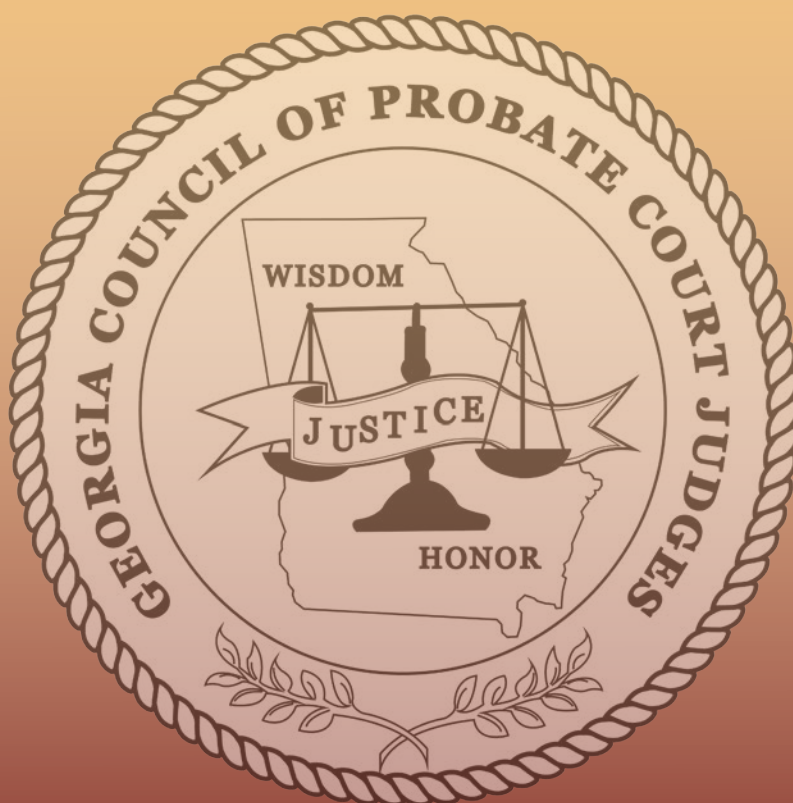


The Official Newsletter  
of the Council of Probate  
Court Judges of Georgia

Volume 21, Number 2

# The Gavel

## Probate News



**Judge Tony Thompson**  
Editor

**Cynthia Clanton**  
AOC Interim Director

**Derrick B. Bryant**  
AOC Graphic Designer

## Table of Contents

---

From the President.....	3
From the Editor.....	4
Legislator of the Year Awards.....	5
In Our Thoughts.....	5
New CPCJ Executive Director.....	6
From the Archives.....	6
COAG Fall Conference.....	7
9th District Meeting.....	8
District 12 Hosts GCIC Training Meeting.....	8
2015 Annual CPCJ Court Conference Pictures.....	9
CPCJ District Directors.....	13

## Judges,

As I said in my first letter, I am honored to be your president. My pride in our Council members was validated on June 26, when Georgia's probate judges responded in a swift and competent manner to the U.S. Supreme Court's Obergefell v. Hodges decision. Our preparation for the decision--and implementation thereof, regardless of our personal beliefs--was positively noted by both local and national media. At the August Judicial Council meeting, Georgia Chief Justice Hugh Thompson commended our actions. My thanks to CPCJ Immediate Past President Chase Daughtrey and Attorney General Sam Olens for their leadership and coordination on the same sex marriage issue.

I must also thank the judges who participated in a CPCJ leadership retreat in June and a strategic planning conference in July. At these meetings, the Council set its priorities for the coming year, streamlined our committee structure and recruited new committee chairs, and developed strategies to enhance the profile and reputation of Georgia's probate courts.

At August's Judicial Council meeting, two pieces of proposed legislation requested by the CPCJ were approved as part of the 2016 Judicial Council legislative agenda. One measure would eliminate the current statutory requirement that probate courts issue marriage licenses on Saturdays. The other bill would increase the required bond amount for probate judges and their clerks from \$25,000 to \$100,000.

The Judicial Council also voted to support our state appropriations request to fund an executive director position for the CPCJ, despite ten superior court judges on the Judicial Council voting against the measure. The Administrative Office of the Courts has reassigned a member of its liaison division to serve our Council full time. While this is a welcome and needed move, it has resulted in some people questioning whether we should still request executive director funds from the state, including some superior court judges. I assure you that our Council would still benefit greatly from having a full time staffer, who can work independently of the AOC and cannot be assigned duties that do not benefit us. Please encourage your legislators to support our executive director request.

I look forward to seeing all of you October 5-9 in Savannah at the COAG fall conference. The AOC will provide training on a new caseload reporting form that all probate judges will be required to use, starting next year. This is one of many training sessions that will be extremely helpful to our membership, so I hope you will attend.

For a complete schedule, visit <http://www.coag.info/assets/Fall/judges%20training.pdf>.

Very truly yours,

Judge Don E. Wilkes  
President, CPCJ



Judge Don E. Wilkes  
President, CPCJ

## Dear Colleagues,

I trust your year is going well. We have seen some truly remarkable changes to our laws and indeed our society as a whole this year. The old constant of nothing remains the same seems to be the guideword.

The same is true of this newsletter. Once a typed newsletter without pictures or graphics, it is now a high tech web production. I trust this issue offers something of use to you. If you have something you want addressed, please let me know.

As we near the end of a training cycle, we'll see our first crop of certified judges. I hope to be among them. But I am reminded of how much there is still to learn and how much I rely on my colleagues for advice and experience. Or as my mother used to say, "It is most important to always know what you don't know."

Please continue to submit articles and pictures for The Gavel, especially your district meeting reports. Photos need to be large file size and/or resolution to be used, so keep that in mind and use the largest version when submitting. If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at [candlerprobate@gmail.com](mailto:candlerprobate@gmail.com) or call at 912-685-2357.

Respectfully yours,

Judge Tony Thompson, Editor



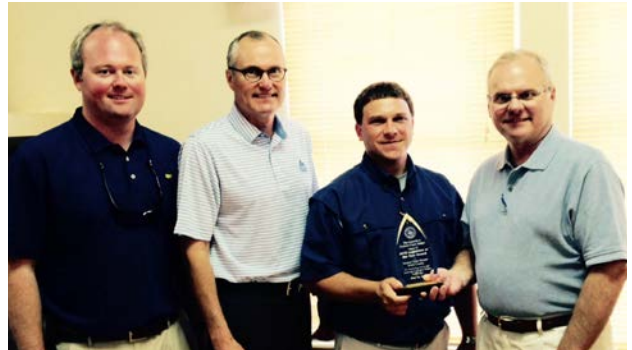
**Pictures from the 2015  
Probate Court Conference inside! pg. 9**



## Probate Judges Present “Legislator of the Year” Awards

The Council selected Sen. Tyler Harper (R-Ocilla) and freshman Rep. Bert Reeves (R-Marietta) for Legislator of the Year awards. Both legislators introduced and sponsored CPCJ bills during the 2015 legislative session that were signed into law.

Sen. Harper is chairman of the Senate Public Safety Committee and sponsored S.B. 62, which clarified probate court jurisdiction over game and fish violations. Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle was on hand for the award presentation to Sen. Harper at the annual Ocilla-Irwin County Legislative Lunch on May 26. Probate judges Ronnie McCurdy, Rooney Bowen and Chase Daughtrey attended the luncheon.



Shown above is Judge Chase Daughtrey of Cook County, Lt. Governor Casey Cagle, Senator Tyler Harper receiving the award, and Judge Rooney Bowen of Dooly County.

Rep. Reeves carried H.B. 119. The bill amended O.C.G.A. Code Section 24-12-21 by exempting probate courts from its requirements related to the disclosure of AIDS information when issuing an order to apprehend a person in need of a mental health evaluation. The law now allows a probate judge to sign an order requiring immediate medical help for mentally ill citizens who suffer from HIV/AIDS. Cobb County Probate Judge Kelli Wolk presented Rep. Reeves with his award at the Marietta Rotary Club on July 15.



Shown above is Judge Kelli Wolk of Cobb County Probate Court presenting the award to Representative Bert Reeves.

You can find more information on these bills and other legislation affecting the judiciary by visiting <http://legislation.georgiacourts.gov/pages/home.jsf>.

## In Our Thoughts

**Probate Judge Betty Anderson** of Wilcox County retired effective May 30th. She has served as Probate Judge since January 1, 1989. Judge Betty continues to have some health problems and asks that we continue to remember her in our prayers. We wish her well in her retirement and pray for a speedy recovery!

**Senior Judge Joyce Wallace Hawkins** of Cumming served nearly 40 years with the Probate Court of Forsyth County, 28 of which were as judge, prior to her retirement in 2004. Judge Hawkins died on June 15, 2015. She served as a church pianist/organist at the Pleasant Grove United Methodist Church for 65 years and was an active member of the Civitan Club for 25 years.

## Welcome Catherine Fitch as new Executive Director of Council of Probate Court Judges of Georgia

The CPCJ now has an AOC employee dedicated full time to serving its needs. Catherine Fitch has been assigned to serve as executive director for our Council, until funding is secured for an independent executive director. Catherine was previously with the AOC's Governmental and Trial Court Liaison division, as a policy analyst for all classes of court. Before joining the AOC, Catherine was an associate with Willard & Sullivan. During legislative sessions, she was counsel to Georgia's House Judiciary Committee, under Chairman Wendell K. Willard. She has worked closely with CPCJ lobbyist Mark Middleton on probate matters during the past five legislative sessions.



Catherine is an honors graduate of Georgia State University College of Law, where she served on the law review board and the Jessup International Moot Court team. Her oldest daughter is a freshman at Georgia State University and her youngest daughter is a freshman at Johns Creek High School.

---

## From the Archives

By Hon. William J. Self II, First editor of The Gavel

From the November 1993 Edition Volume I. No. 2

### **Still No Name**

Judging from the response I got from the initial "trial run" of our new newsletter, many of you take matters "under advisement" for a long time or too many of you don't care what we call the newsletter or how often it's published...

Judge Smith (Irwin County) had two good suggestions: "The Gavel" or "The Georgia Probate Judges' Newsletter." Judge Cape (Barrow County) sent in twelve good suggestions: "Probate Times of Georgia," "The Judges Gavel," "The Probate Gavel of Georgia," "The Judges' Forum," "The True Oath," "The Probate Record," "The Executor's Oath," "The Probate Citation of Georgia," "Probate News and Letters," "The Probate Docket," "Georgia Probate News" and "The Probate Reporter."



**COAG Fall Conference, Savannah, GA - October 5-9, 2015**  
**Probate Judges Training**

Date	Time	Activity	Meeting Room
Monday Oct 5	2:00-5:00	Registration	Pre-Function
	2:00-4:00	Probate Judges Training Council	
Tuesday Oct 6	7:30-9:00	Buffet Breakfast	Pre-Function
	7:30-5:00	Registration	Pre-Function
	8:00-5:00	Exhibits Open	Pre-Function
	9:00-12:00	Probate Judges Executive Committee	
	12:00-1:30	COAG Lunch	
	1:00-3:00	Probate Judges Training <b>Records Retention, COOP / Active Shooter Response</b> <i>Judge Tammy Brown, Barrow County</i>	
	3:00-4:00	Probate Judges Training <b>Weapons Carry License Q &amp; A</b> <i>Judge Susan Tate, Athens-Clarke County</i> <i>Judge Chase Daughtrey</i>	
	4:00-5:00	Council of Probate Judges Business Meeting	
	6:00-8:00	COAG Board of Directors	
Wednesday Oct 7	7:30-9:00	Buffet Breakfast	Pre-Function
	8:00-5:00	Registration	Pre-Function
	8:00-3:00	Exhibits Open	Pre-Function
	9:00-5:00	Superior Court Clerks Computer Lab	
	9:00-12:00	Probate Judges Training <b>ICJE: Mentor Certification</b> <i>Atty. Rich Reaves, ICJE</i> <i>Tiffany Sargent, ICJE</i>	
	12:00-2:00	COAG Lunch and Business Meeting Installation of Officers and Presentation of Officer of the Year	Harborside Center
	2:00-5:00	COAG Joint Training	Harborside Center
Thursday Oct 8	8:00-9:00	Breakfast	Pre-Function
	8:00-11:00	Registration	Pre-Function
	9:00-10:00	Probate Judges Training <b>Comprehensive 2015 Legislative Update, Same Sex Marriage &amp; Implications of O.C.G.A 15-21-12</b> <i>Judge Chase Daughtrey</i>	
	10:00-12:00	Probate Judges Training <b>New Case Load Reporting Requirements</b> <i>Christopher Hansard, AOC</i> <i>Robert Aycock, AOC</i>	
	12:00-1:00	COAG Planning Committee Meeting	

## 9th District Probate Judges Meeting

Judge Mary Jo Buxton  
Johnson County Probate Court

The Probate Judges of the 9th District held a meeting June 18 in Eastman at Sidetracks Cafe. Judge Al McCranie, Dodge County, hosted this event with Judicial Alternatives of Georgia sponsoring the meal. Kenneth Kight, co-owner of JAG probation, spoke about the new probation laws and suggested changes to our forms. Also, Michele Tedder of EZ Court Pay introduced their online credit/debit card payment system. Both presentations were excellent. Judge Mary Jo Buxton quickly went over other changes in the laws taking effect July 1. The judges enjoyed a time of round table discussions of "What would you do?"



Front row:

Paul McNeal, Jeff Davis County  
Jolinda Harrelson, Wheeler County  
Kenneth Powell, Bleckley County  
Helen Harper, Laurens County

Standing:

Jeff Jones, Pulaski County  
Mary Jo Buxton, Johnson County  
Rubie Nell Sanders, Montgomery County  
T.J. Hudson, Treutlen County (District Director)  
Al McCranie, Dodge County  
Shawn Rhodes, Wilcox County  
Gary Nobles, Twiggs County (guest Probate Judge)

## District 12 Hosts GCIC Training Meeting

Judge Virginia Acord  
Worth County Probate Court

District 12 held a meeting on May 14, 2015. Guest speakers were, LaTonya DeBruce, GCIC Customer Support & Training; Denise McDaniel, GCIC Compliance Auditor; and Melissa Mefferd, GCIC Compliance Program Manager. They took the time to discuss what we should expect on our upcoming GCIC audit.



Front Row Left to Right - Denise McDaniel GCIC Compliance Auditor, Melissa Mefferd GCIC Compliance Program Manager, LaTonya DeBruce GCIC Customer Support & Training

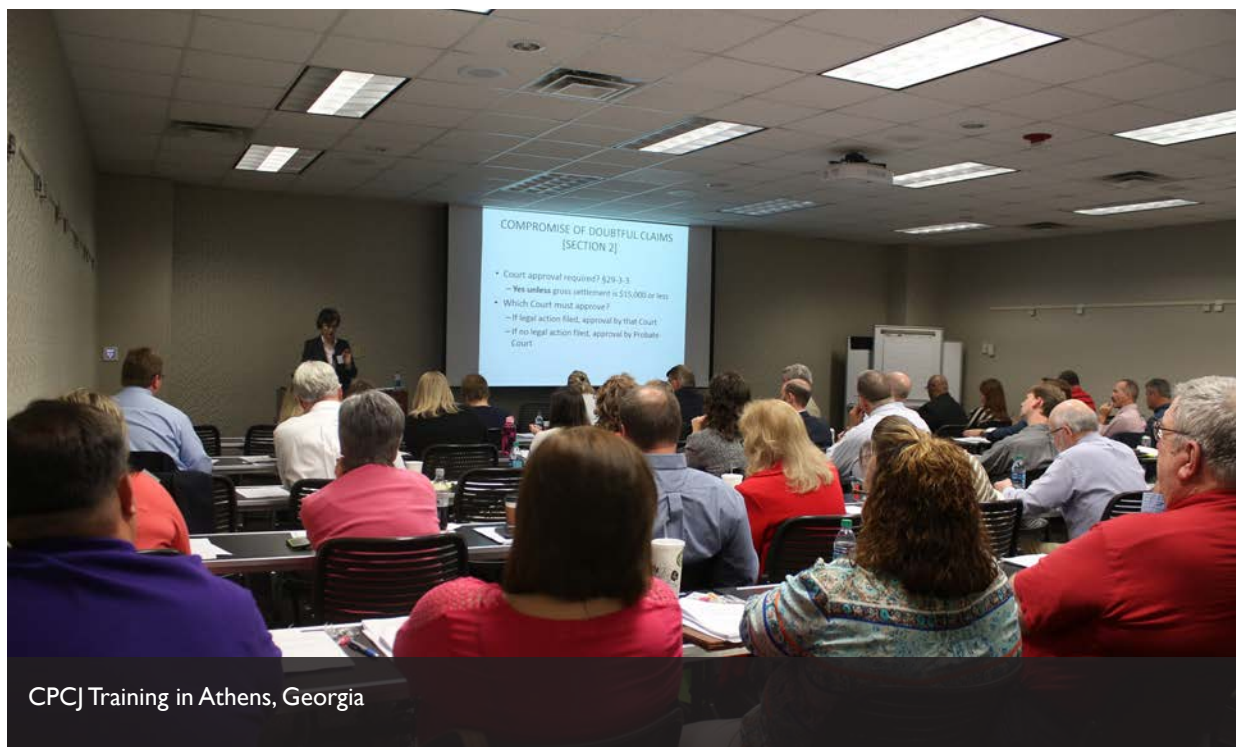
Second Row Left to Right – Judge Penny Thomas, Debbie Womble (Seminole Co. Clerk), Judge Beth Hurst, Judge Angela Hendricks, Judge Vickie Thomas

Third Row Left to Right – Judge Brenda McNease, Judge Suzanne Johnson, Judge Terri Adams McDowell, Lizzie Garrett (Brooks Co. Clerk), Diane Allen (Grady Co. Clerk), Brenda Nixon (Thomas County Clerk), Judge Denise Maddox, Judge Virginia Acord

Last Row Left to Right – Judge Robert Richardson, Judge Wes Lewis, Jennifer Blakely (Colquitt Co. Clerk)



# 2015 Annual Conference



CPCJ Training in Athens, Georgia

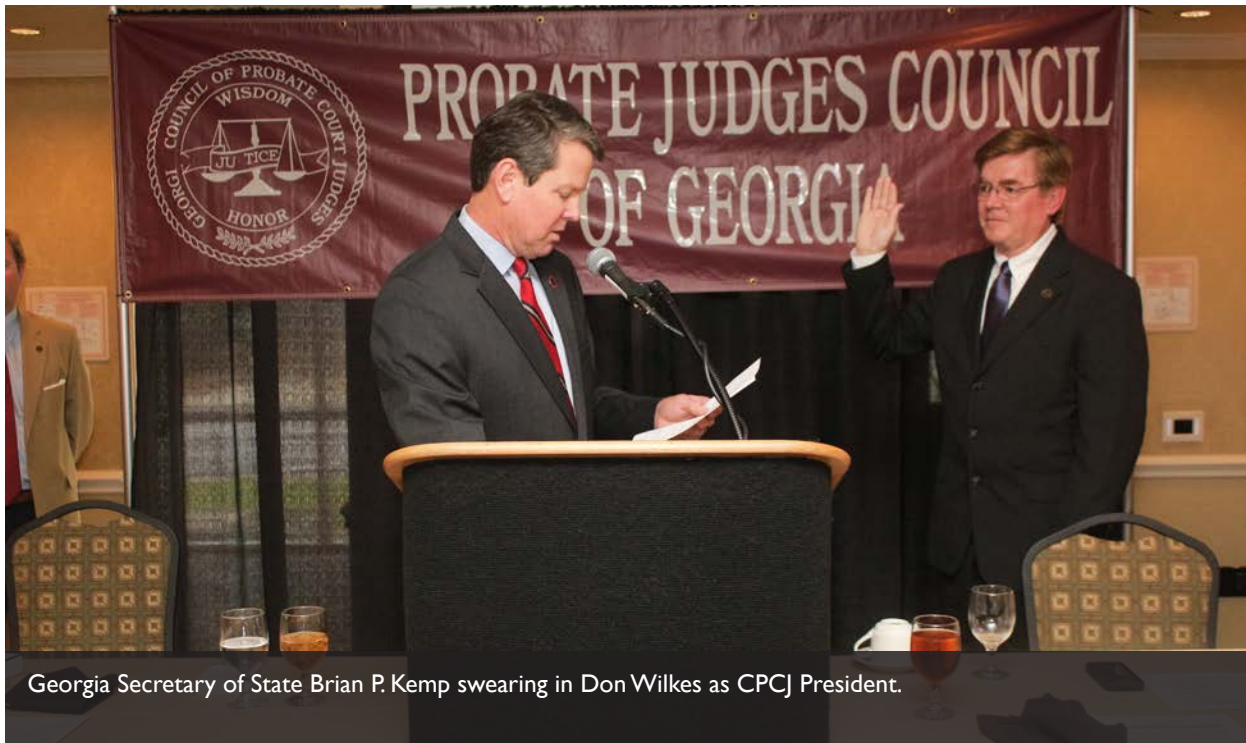


Judges viewing different vendors at the CPCJ annual meeting in Athens, Georgia

# 2015 Annual Conference



Pausing during break are (L to R): Judges Moya Howard(Pierce County), Beth Mosley(Effingham County), Gary Nobles(Twigg County), Tony Thompson(Candler County), Alice Padgett(Columbia County) and Mitzi E.Way(Schley County).



Georgia Secretary of State Brian P. Kemp swearing in Don Wilkes as CPCJ President.



# 2015 Annual Conference



Georgia Secretary of State Brian P. Kemp swearing in President-elect Judge Alice Padgett, First Vice President Judge Rooney Bowen III, and Secretary-Treasurer Darin McCoy.



CPCJ 2015-16 Officers: President Don Wilkes, President-elect Alice Padgett, First Vice President Rooney Bowen III, and Secretary-Treasurer Darin McCoy.

## 2015 Recognition Awardees of Attendance



### 15 Year Awardees of Attendance

front row- left to right--Judge Joe Boatright (Bacon Co.), Judge Brenda McNease, (Miller Co.), Judge Joseph Bledsoe, (Heard Co.), Judge Lee Moss, (Lincoln Co.), Judge Betty Thomas, (Banks Co.), Judge Tammy Brown, (Barrow Co.), Judge Penny E. Thomas, (Turner Co.), Judge Angela Hendricks, (Baker Co.)

back row-left to right- Judge Carlos Rodgers, (Echols Co.), Judge Deborah Andersen, (Paulding Co.), Judge Mary Jo Buxton, (Johnson Co.), Judge Wanda Burke, (Jenkins Co.) , Judge Ruby Nell Sanders, (Montgomery Co.), Judge Glenda Ernest, (Stephens Co.), Judge Annie Doris Holder, (Calhoun Co.)



### 20 Year Awardee of Attendance Judge Tonya Holley, Early County



### 30 Year Awardees of Attendance Judge John Wheaton, Lee County and Judge Beverly W. Nation, Oglethorpe County



### 40 Year Awardee of Attendance Judge John M. Payne, Chattooga County



## 2015 Outstanding Probate Judge of the Year Award



Outgoing CPCJ President Chase Daughtrey presented Judge Keith Wood of Cherokee County with the 2015 Outstanding Probate Judge of the Year Award. Judge Wood chaired the Probate Judges Training Council from April 2013 - April 2015.

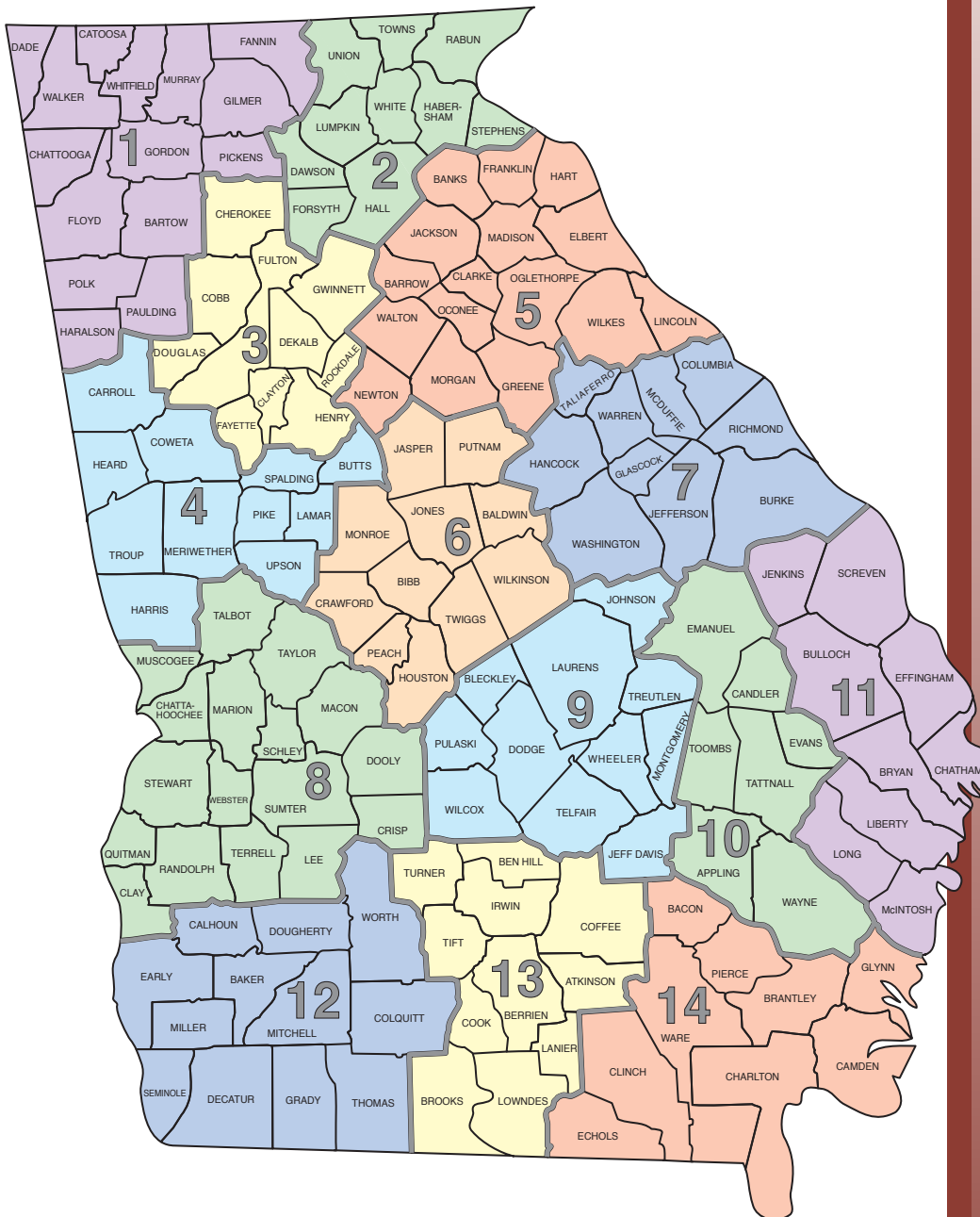
## 2015 Council's Special Recognition Award



The Council's Special Recognition Award was presented to Judge Pam Ferguson of Clayton County, in recognition for her work as the longstanding chair of the Court Rules and Forms Committee.

# CPCJ

## DISTRICT DIRECTORS



DISTRICT 1  
JUDGE DEBORAH ANDERSEN

DISTRICT 2  
JUDGE CHARLES D. BRACKETT

DISTRICT 3  
JUDGE KELLEY POWELL

DISTRICT 4  
JUDGE KATHRYN MARTIN

DISTRICT 5  
JUDGE SUSAN P. TATE

DISTRICT 6  
JUDGE GARY NOBLES

DISTRICT 7  
JUDGE RUSSELL SHEPPARD

DISTRICT 8  
JUDGE MARC D'ANTONIO

DISTRICT 9  
JUDGE T.J. HUDSON

DISTRICT 10  
JUDGE LARRY THRELKELD

DISTRICT 11  
JUDGE BETH MOSLEY

DISTRICT 12  
JUDGE VIRGINIA ACORD

DISTRICT 13  
JUDGE CHASE DAUGHTREY

DISTRICT 14  
JUDGE CALVIN BENNETT

Judicial Council of Georgia  
Administrative Office of the Courts  
244 Washington Street, SW • Suite 300  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
404-656-5171 • [www.georgiacourts.gov](http://www.georgiacourts.gov)